

## CHURCH OF IRELAND MARRIAGE COUNCIL

### REPORT 2024

#### MEMBERSHIP

##### *Appointed by the House of Bishops*

Member of the House of Bishops: Most Rev Pat Storey (Bishop of Meath & Kildare)

##### *Elected by General Synod*

Rev Jonathan Campbell-Smyth (Chairperson)	Rev Emma Rutherford
Rev Canon Nicola Halford (Resigned September 2023)	Rev James Boyd (Resigned November 2023)
Rev Ian Linton	Mrs Patsy Devoy
Ms Dianne Morris (Resigned November 2023)	Mrs Kay Clarke

##### *In Attendance*

Ms Aisling Sheridan  
(Administrative Secretary)

##### *Proposed Membership 2024 – 2026*

Most Rev Pat Storey	Rev Emma Rutherford
Vacant (Chairperson)	Mrs Patsy Devoy
Rev Ian Linton	Mrs Kay Clarke
Ms Heather James	Ms Esther Simpson
Rev Carlton Baxter	

#### **New Initiatives**

In 2023, the Council rolled out a new communications strategy designed to raise awareness of its aims. In addition the Council were keen to make church leaders aware of the subsidised counselling services supported by The Child and Family Agency, TúsIa. A short video on the Council's counselling and marriage preparation services, featuring some of the counsellors on its panel and couples who have benefitted from its services, was launched at General Synod in Wexford in May 2023 and subsequently shown at most Diocesan Synods throughout the coming year. A new leaflet with information on counselling services was also launched and distributed throughout the island of Ireland. Additional leaflets are available to churches upon request.

#### **Marriage Preparation & Counselling**

The demand for marriage preparation and counselling has been steady over the last year. *TúsIa*, the Family Support Agency, has once again given funding towards marriage counselling in the Republic of Ireland. **We would encourage clergy and church leaders to get in touch with the Council to access these funds.** If these funds are not utilised, then there is danger that external funds may not be available in the future. The Council now offers six sessions free of charge to couples, with full details of where counsellors are available on our website [www.ireland.anglican.org](http://www.ireland.anglican.org) .

Most counsellors have been making their services available online since the Covid-19 pandemic. In December the members of the Council met counsellors to help them network and understand more of our aims and objectives. It is planned that these meetings will become regular events to enable counsellors to make the best use of subsidised services. In addition to marriage support, some counsellors are available to lead couples through marriage preparation in collaboration with church leaders.

*The current group of counsellors used is:*

- Mr Brian Griffin (Dublin)
- Ms Dianne Morris (Dublin)
- Ms Shona Rusk (Dublin)
- Ms Helen Groves (Dublin)
- Ms Heather James (South East)
- Ms Sylvia Helen (Cork)
- Mr Shawn Jamieson (South West)
- Ms Lynne Heber (Belfast)
- Ms Ali Knight (Coleraine)
- Care In Crisis (Armagh)
- Christian Guidelines (Down, Fermanagh & Tyrone)

Whilst these counselling services are available, the Council is very much dependent on clergy and those who support couples to refer them to counsellors. The Council therefore encourages General Synod to promote the use of marriage counsellors in their local parish contexts. Copies of the Council's new information leaflet are available at Reception and from [aisling.sheridan@rcbcoi.org](mailto:aisling.sheridan@rcbcoi.org).

### **Marriage Council External Funding**

Although *Túsla* have once again provided funding towards marriage counselling, and indeed have allocated an increased grant, we have seen substantial cuts over the years. Whilst this provides a great challenge, no one is ever turned away, even if they cannot afford to contribute to the cost of the counselling session.

### **Retirements**

During the past year, a number of members of the Council have stepped down from their positions. These are Ms Dianne Morris, Rev James Boyd and Rev Canon Nicola Halford. We would like to express our thanks for the contribution that these members have made to the work of the Council.

### **Future Plans**

We hope that having raised awareness of our work in this past year, that the counselling services offered across Ireland would be more widely used.

Plans for 2024 include holding three online seminars of one hour each on the following topics:

- Bereavement – recognising the changes in daily life after a loved one has died;
- Blended families – easing into a new situation;
- Divorce/separation – supporting through the journey.

It is also hoped to offer encouragement for clergy couples in the form of an overnight stay or a relationships retreat.

As always, the Council is here to support local church leaders and couples. We would be delighted to assist anyone who could benefit from our range of services.